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An Update from APCET

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Delivered during the
2nd Introductory Course on Indonesia and East Timor
and
VIth Symposium on East Timor of Oporto University
Lisbon, Portugal
March 21 to 27,1995

The Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET) which took place in Manila from May 31 to June 4, 1994 has long ended. But it brought back world-wide attention to the issue of East Timor which Suharto had succeeded in hiding all these years – most especially in the ASEAN region.

APCET challenged not only Indonesia's annexation of East Timor but also Suharto's invasion of Philippine foreign policy. In an attempt to walk the thin line between recognition of the freedoms guaranteed to Filipino citizens by our Constitution and appeasement of Suharto, President Ramos banned the participation of foreign delegates – a gross miscalculation on his part as this act only served to draw more attention to what both governments were collaborating to hide.

APCET is the first major experience of South-South solidarity of its kind. Considered to be among the poorest in a region of "economic tigers," we Filipinos are nevertheless proud of our democratic traditions and staunch commitment to human rights and civil liberties.

That APCET was successfully held and achieved its aims far beyond our expectations only proved that no government can disempower a people determined to empower themselves.

The issue of human rights and self-determination can never be left solely in the hands of government. Only people in solidarity with the struggles of other peoples against violations perpetrated by governments can assure the ventilation and final resolution of the issue. The Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor has ended. In its place now stands the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor – forging a people-to-people solidarity, inspite and despite ASEAN's stand on the issue.

It is with a certain amount of pride, therefore, that I would like to report on the various efforts of the different solidarity groups in Asia in

general and in the Philippines in particular to wage a relentless and uncompromising information and awareness campaign on East Timor.

As a side note, I would also like to say that ever since APCET, hardly a week goes by without a news item on East Timor in major Philippine newspapers. I also continue to receive a number of clippings from friends abroad. There is obviously a continuing interest now in the issue. Strangers have walked up to me at the airport, in shopping malls, hotels, bookstores, even at my doctor's clinic to ask me how the East Timor issue is coming along. There was a time when leaving for Bangkok, an immigration officer said to me," Mr. Constantino, I hope you're not thinking of going to Indonesia." So my friends, thanks to Suharto and Ramos, East Timor has become part of the consciousness of quite number of my people.

But I have digressed. The last regional Council meeting of the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor held in Bangkok just last February 5-6, 1995 designated certain dates where all concerned groups in different countries would hold simultaneous activities/actions to focus attention on the unresolved issue of East Timor and as an expression of solidarity with the Maubere people. Following are the salient points:

Thailand:

A group organized specifically for East Timor has not yet been formed due to the relative scarcity of translated materials and information on the subject. But they're working on it.

Nepal:

Nepalwatch wants to be aligned with APCET and has expressed its desire for videos and background materials so that a Southeast Asia Forum on East Timor based in Nepal can be formed.

Sri Lanka:

A solidarity group for East Timor now exists. This was initiated by Sri Lankans who were barred entry and deported by the Philippine government during APCET. The Peoples' Plan for the 21st Century (PP21) is holding its conference in December in Colombo. Leading members of PP21 have committed to promote awareness of the East Timorese issue.

Hongkong:

Hongkong has been busy. The Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples have launched urgent appeals and actions and have been visiting East Timorese groups in Macau.

Australia/New Zealand:

The East Timor issue continues to be very much alive in Australia. 1995 being the 20th year of the Indonesian invasion, a number of institutions and organizations are finalizing plans to hold conferences and speaking tours with foreign speakers as well as Timorese and Indonesians in key cities to ventilate the issue further. Five national groups, in fact, have just formed the Australian Coalition for a Free East Timor. It is also in the agenda of activists working in New Zealand.

New Caledonia/Pacific Islands:

The growing concern over East Timor in this area can be seen in the expression of Melsol, IKRUFF and NFIP to affiliate with APCET.

Japan:

Media coverage on East Timor has very notably increased in 1994. The Japan Coalition for East Timor is currently working on a plan to hold an international forum on the issue in November.

Korea:

For the very first time in Korea, a demonstration for East Timor in front of the Indonesian embassy was held last December 1994. A support group for East Timor has also just been formed.

Indonesia:

Inasmuch as Suharto's Indonesia regards East Timorese as "separatists" and "criminals," a project that would demystify and educate the Indonesians on the East Timor issue is going to be followed up by Indonesian friends.

INFOD will soon be publishing articles on Irian Jaya, Aceh and, like the Pijar magazine, will raise the issue of East Timor.

Four Indonesian organizations are conducting a national campaign to release all Timorese political prisoners. In August they will publicly declare their solidarity with the Maubere people.

Philippines:

The Philippine Solidarity for East Timor and Indonesia (PHILSETI) is currently embarked on an education program

designed to widen awareness and continuing interest on the issue among the students in particular and the Filipino public in general. It is also involved in lobby and advocacy work in Congress, particularly the Foreign Relations Committees of both houses as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs. It will join simultaneous activities being planned by APCET, including mobilizing support for Bishop Belo's nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. PHILSETI intends to draw further attention by commemorating APCET (the conference) this coming June.

But more than anything else, a significant bond has been forged among the East Timorese, Indonesian and Filipino people. Last January, I made an appeal to various human rights advocates and organizations to help us Filipinos in our continuing struggle to free more than 290 political prisoners who continue to languish in 57 jails all over the country. One of those to whom I addressed an appeal was Xanana Gusmao who, as we all know, is currently incarcerated in a maximum security prison in Indonesia. Despite this fact, and with the help of Indonesian friends, my appeal got to him and I subsequently received his reply addressed to our political prisoners who were then on a hunger strike to dramatize their plight. I mention this because this incident clearly illustrates that beyond prison bars and barbed wires of government, there will always be the people who will reach out to help and give comfort to one another – prison to prison if need be.

Once again, it has been made clear that while the governments of ASEAN may maintain their conspiracy of silence with Indonesia; the peoples of the region certainly will not.

Proposal: **A Creative Visual Presentation Popularizing the East Timorese Issue to the Filipino General Public**

Proponent: **Department of Visual Communication**
College of Fine Arts
University of the Philippines

1. RATIONALE

The main problem encountered by APCET in popularizing the East Timorese issue to the Filipino general public is the seeming isolation of East Timorese experience from the Filipinos' concerns . In order to solve this problem, this project proposal focuses its efforts in the providing the unifying connection between Philippine issues and East Timorese issues. In general, it is believed that in the realms of economic, political and cultural domination, both Filipinos and East Timorese have similar historical and current experiences. It is further perceived that there is only one "enemy" with the intention of global exploitation, including the Philippines and East Timor, in the name of their "development" activities.

With the above mentioned focus, this project intends to confront the problem by providing a creative visual presentation which will popularize the East Timorese issue to the Filipino general public. It is believed that the failure of popularizing many significant issues in the world is generally attributed to the saturation of words, both textual and oral. A creative visual presentation is more easily absorbed, mentally retained, emotionally touching and visually attractive.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 Short-range Objective: To popularize the East Timorese issue within the Philippines context.

2.2 Long-range Objective: To establish solidarity groups among Filipino students and academicians, etc.

3. AUDIENCE

The audience of this project will certainly be the Filipino people. For a more organized visual presentation, however, three levels of Filipino audience must further be addressed:

3.1 The academic Filipino audience (univerisities, colleges and schools - students and faculty members),

3.2 The non-academic Filipino intellectual (corporations, institutions and media), and

3.3 The Filipino general public.

4. COMMUNICATION APPROACH

One of the main obstacles to confront is how to make the Filipino general public identify, empathize with the East Timorese issue. Deeper than this, do Filipinos themselves really understand their own local problems? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

One task therefore is to make local issues and concerns comprehensible to Filipinos themselves. The recommended approach is by visually presenting particular human rights violations in the Philippines such as the displacement of tribal communities from ancestral lands, the absence of government support for OCWs, the military actions against counter-insurgency in the name of NIChood, etc.

What will be underscored and highlighted is that Filipinos should be concerned with gross violation of human rights.

And such gross violations of human rights do not only occur in our own land - but also among our Asian neighbors as well as across the globe. The East Timorese experience is one of these countries which urgently needs attention. It must likewise be pointed out that in solidarity with East Timor, the Filipinos must "fight" the same enemy: entities that disregard human rights in the process of exploiting natural resources.

5. THE CREATIVE SOLUTION

The general overview of the creative solution will provide the unifying connection between Philippine and East Timorese experiences. The main sentiment will be that both Filipinos and East Timorese must struggle against the same "enemy" of foreign economic domination. It is the people versus the conspiracy between local governments and TNCs.

The visual presentation will be formulated in two phases:

5.1 Philippine issues using TNC angle: economic, political and cultural, and

5.2 East Timor issue within the Philippine context.

6. MEDIA VEHICLES

Due to the high cost of traditional media vehicles, the project's communication will utilize/optimize alternative media vehicles. These media vehicles may be used for conferences, seminars, school fairs, as well as integrated in the social studies (Araling Panlipunan) and social sciences curricula for elementary, high school and tertiary level education.

6.1 Posters: Two types of posters will be designed, one for the

more intellectual audience, the other for general popularization of the issues.

6.2 Video documentary for institutions, universities and possibly broadcast television.

6.3 Maximizing existing mass media formats such as Probe, Inside Story, etc. for high profile puproses.

6.4 Optimize last year's conference to demonstrate the conspiracy between local government and TNCs.

6.5 Pamphlets and visual manifestos

6.6 T-Shirt designs as mobile promotional vehicles

6.7 Wall and desk calendars

6.8 Book markers

6.9 A set of travelling photo exhibit

6.10 Tapping *Samahan ng mga Kartunista sa Pilipinas (SKP)*, editorial cartoonists and columnists.

The problem is how to organize all the media blitz as a gradual development of issues that will create the BIG BLOW!

THE END